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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

11 August 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Military Plan for Southeast Asia

The following observations occur to me as the result of the briefing which you received from General Lemnitzer on the military planning for Southeast Asia.

The most interesting course of action is the third which was presented, based upon the cooperative action of Laos, Thailand and Vietnam to control the Laotian panhandle and as much of North Laos as possible, all with minimum U.S. support. If this course of action proves to be feasible, it offers us an alternative more attractive than dependence upon SEATO Plan 5, which is inadequate to restore the situation, or upon U.S. military intervention directed mainly at North Vietnam.

The first step, as I see it, is to verify that we have in this a truly feasible military plan. I was not convinced on this point yesterday, and am going to the Pentagon today to make a more thorough study of the plan in its present state. As General Lemnitzer indicated, the Joint Chiefs are still working on it.

If indeed the plan appears feasible, then we have the task of fitting it into the context of an overall plan for Southeast Asia which includes political and economic elements as well. There is a great deal of political action necessary to provide a basis for the implementation of this military plan. The State Department has already queried our ambassadors in Bangkok, Vientiane and Saigon with regard to their views of the plan and the probable requirement for U.S. support in their respective countries.

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As you can see, there is much work to be done to tidy up the situation in Southeast Asia. What it most requires is energetic leadership on the part of State in pulling together all components of this area plan. There is still no Task Force charged with the interdepartmental aspects. I am sure that greater intensity of effort is required to get this plan in order than has been expended to date.

Moreover, time is running out as the dry season in Laos approaches. I do not believe we can afford any further delay in this matter.

Maxwell D. Taylor

SECRET